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American Musical Theatre History

Written Assignment: Your Musical Adaptation

Professor Bartoli

Due: December 8, 2016

“Things I Never Talk About” by Manhattanville College’s very own, Lanisha Porter is a true and personal story of her own life being raised without the presence of her mother. Throughout the story, Porter discusses her emotional, spiritual, and psychological experience of entering womanhood without the guidance of her biological mother after her 6-7 years of life. A good book and good music are often the most dominant contributions to a musical. This book demonstrated the trying moments as well as the most progressive moments of the author’s life. The various emotions of these moments would create many great scene structures that imitate the author’s thoughts, actions, and feelings. This book can also be made into a musical because it would reach the audience on an emotional level. Many young girls view their mother as an inspiration. Growing up into womanhood can be hard and can damage a young girl’s sense of security within society. This play would be an integrated musical in order to blend the plot, the songs, and the incorporated dances. Blending the plot, songs, and dances would not only allow the audience to understand the play itself but to also identify the value and importance of having and appreciating a mother based on Porter’s experience of growing up without one.

The choreography within this musical would be authentic to the African American southern culture. Throughout the musical, there would be choreography of ballet and hip hop. There would also be some jazz incorporated into the musical. Porter’s life story of the absence of her mother as a young girl had some pros and cons. Although Porter’s mother lived in a different state, Porter still idolized her mother and communicated with her over the phone. Her mother also visited from Louisiana periodically, but to any young girl that just wasn’t enough. Porter learned a lot from church, other women, her brother, and her father. When Porter’s mother had the time to visit, Porter seemed to have her happiest moments. However, when her mother had to leave to return to her own home and regular life, Porter experienced her most trying times feeling psychologically and emotionally damaged at the fact that her mother, her idol was no longer there especially because she was unsure of when she’d return. The choreography of her saddest moments may be more calmer in terms of choreography with ballet to set the tone. Her most joyful moments may be more upbeat with hip hop and jazz.

In this musical, the actors would be voiced with gospel-like sound. There would be an integration of soprano, alto, and tenor voices especially on the most meaningful scenes with the church-like choir. The original book by Lanisha Porter takes place in Louisville, Kentucky. She was raised with southern-like qualities and was and still is heavily involved in the Christian church where the gospel is substantially valued. Throughout the novel, Porter also goes into detail about the substituted women who played major parts in her upbringing. She also distinctively describes her relationship with her father, her brothers, and occasionally her biological mother. The casting of this musical would consist of roles of those who she found dearest to her (her father, her brother, her mother, her few friends, the women in her life, the church, and God).

One dramatic moment that I would convert into musical numbers would be the first chapter of Porter’s book called “Childhood.” Throughout the first chapter, Porter describes her experience of disappearing from her home town in Louisville with her mother and her mother’s soon-to-be-husband, Greg and being separated from her brothers and father. She describes her experience of being unaware that she wouldn’t be able to have contact with her father and brothers at the age of four. She lived with her mother in what she refers to “an exceptional decent home” for two years until her mother finally reached out to her biological father about where they had disappeared to. When her father arrives to Louisiana and decides it’d be best for Porter to live in Louisville with him and her brother, Porter relocates back to her hometown. This musical number would begin to get the point across of the very different living environment, the feeling of abandonment by her mother, and all of the psychological and emotional destruction that came with the new change.

In the book “Things I Never Talk About,” Porter expresses her relationship with God. She mentions that one of the most important things that got her through life was prayer. The dramatic moment that I would convert into musical numbers is her conversation and covenant to God about saving herself for marriage. This would be a musical soliloquy of Porter committing her life to God and praying for the strength to save herself for sex, marriage, and dating. This musical soliloquy would acknowledge her values and beliefs because her spirituality played a vital role in her life and development to become a woman of integrity, class, sass, faithfulness, persistence, courage, strength, and dignity.

Porter talks about overcoming her emotional state of grieving over the presence of her mother, persevering, and becoming successful. In one of her final chapters of her book, she talks about finding her worth, knowing who she is as a person, and a self-taught woman of color. This musical number would focus on her achievement of receiving a scholarship to New York’s Manhattanville College. The scene would allow the audience to see her love for her mother despite the fact that she was not heavily involved in Porter’s childhood. Like the book, Porter’s mother would help her prepare and move into college. This scene would include a gospel choir singing in a blend of hip hop and gospel form in order for the audience to understand the themes of forgiveness, love, tenacity, and determination.